

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB284:
“An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status”

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Dr. Tanner Bommersbach, I am a physician working across New Haven County.

I stand in support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need. However, our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults, because children do better when their parents do better.

I work as a psychiatrist in a community mental health center and often care for undocumented individuals who have overcome unimaginable challenges in their lives and continue to contribute to our communities in inspiring ways. Yet, these individuals are unable to access affordable healthcare due to their immigration status. As their doctor, I struggle to get them basic services, including preventive primary care visits, medications to treat their psychiatric conditions, nursing care, and referrals to specialists.

One college student I worked with who is undocumented has a serious condition that causes her to experience seizure-like episodes multiple times a day. For over a year, she was not able to see a neurologist to properly evaluate these episodes due to her undocumented status. These episodes significantly impacted her school studies, her job opportunities, and her ability to stay involved in her church, which is her favorite activity. After struggling with her debilitating symptoms for several years without appropriate medical care, she had to take a leave of absence from her college classes, delaying her goal of becoming a social worker to help other young adults facing similar challenges.

This is just one of many patient stories that I have encountered trying to provide quality care for undocumented individuals in a system that prohibits it. I struggle knowing that my undocumented patients have the right to go to school in CT, but they do not have the right to basic healthcare in CT. Today, I am urging you to join nine other states, including Massachusetts and New York, to pass SB 284.

Passing this bill is not only the right thing to do, I also believe it makes financial sense for our state. According to an analysis conducted by the Connecticut Health Foundation and Georgetown University, expanding HUSKY A and B to undocumented children under 19 in CT is **estimated to cost \$11.3 million for year one and \$13.9 million for year two, for a total of \$25.3 million over the biennium**. In 2020 alone, Connecticut hospitals provided \$774 million in unreimbursed and uncompensated care, similar to the expensive care provided to many of my patients who are undocumented every time they have to go to the emergency room because it's the only way they can get access to healthcare.

I support S.B. 284, and I ask the committee to pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all community members in CT regardless of age or status because **healthy children need healthy families**.

Thank you for your time,
Tanner Bommersbach, MD MPH